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SUBJECT: VP ABD AL-MEHDI, AMB, AND S/I DISCUSS SADRIST  
INSURRECTION, ARAB LEAGUE SUMMIT, REGIONAL RELATIONS, AND  
SOFA/SFA NEGOTIATIONS

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S) Summary. In a March 27 meeting with Ambassador Crocker and S/I Satterfield, VP Adel Abd al-Mehdi weighed in on the current Sadrism insurrection, labeling the Sadrists as "fragmented and weak." He also highlighted the incredible restraint that the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) has shown in the face of the recent attacks, indicating that ISCI and the ISCI-affiliated Badr Brigades were not going to be drawn into this conflict. During the meeting, Adel also informed the Ambassador and Satterfield of his intention to attend the upcoming Arab League summit in Damascus, which was met with displeasure. Defending his decision to attend, Adel told the Ambassador and S/I that Iraq had to live in the neighborhood, and it was in their best interest to establish and maintain relations with its neighbors. Adel also discussed the SOFA/SFA negotiations, with both sides agreeing on the importance of these agreements and the need for mutual involvement. End Summary.

The Sadrism Insurrection: March Madness  
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12. (S) After exchanging pleasantries, Adel immediately launched into the Sadrists, claiming that the Special Groups were targeting ISCI leaders' homes in the Red Zone, including his. Attempting to assuage Adel's concerns, the Ambassador informed him that the military experts believed that many of the hits in both the IZ and the Red Zone have been the result of luck rather than skill or science, positing that they are not well-aimed and that the militias were not even using launch tubes. The Ambassador also declared that the CF have been careful and measured in response, as they do not want to give the SG any propaganda tool that might be used to influence public opinion. Though there have been some skirmishes between CF and ISF and the SG, provoked by the SG, the Ambassador noted that CF has been restrained and the situation has not escalated. He also praised Adel, ISCI, the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) for their restraint, and he mentioned the positive phone call he had with Sayyid Abd al Aziz al-Hakim.

13. (S) After informing the Ambassador that the Presidency Council was going to issue a statement about the situation, Adel mentioned that he had already spoken with Prime Minister Maliki several times. Appearing somewhat displeased with the timing of the military operation in Basrah, Adel questioned whether preparations for the offensive were sufficient. Adel also told the Ambassador that he had been in contact with the Governor of Kut, who believes the Sadrists are much weaker now. In Adel's estimation, they are also much more fragmented than before, and have lost the support of the population. He also posited that their civil disobedience campaign has been based on coercion and intimidation, to which the Ambassador replied that "it appears they are headed into al-Qaeda territory," with their actions.

14. (S) In response to Adel's complaint that the media was trying to turn the current insurrection into an ISCI-JAM confrontation, the Ambassador defined the current conflict as "the GOI fighting criminal elements." He added that people should know the truth about the SG's activities, stating that they were attacking schools and markets, and intimidating the population. Adel agreed, and said that the Sadrism movement has a very limited following, stating that they have no support in Diwaniyyah, Karbala, Samawa, and that even in Najaf the movement was small. He also believes that their following is limited in Baghdad as well. After stating that attempts need to be made to reach out to the moderates among the Sadrist, Adel mentioned a letter he had recently received, allegedly issued by Muqtada al-Sadr himself, in which al-Sadr called on his followers to take advantage of the 72-hour deadline to cease hostilities issued by Maliki. Referring to this document, he indicated that this was yet more evidence that the movement was fragmented and falling apart, to which the Ambassador and Satterfield reacted in agreement. (Note: This document was provided to the Ambassador and has been translated).

15. (S) Later in the meeting, the Ambassador returned to their earlier conversation about the Sadrist insurrection, reiterating that it was very important for the GOI to get the story out about the Sadrist attacks against homes and schools, indicating that they needed to dispel Sadrist claims that their actions were only directed at the ISF and CF. Adel said there would be a campaign, and then he shared that he had been informed about a Sadrist movement in Nasiriyyah by the Thi Qar governor, who believed that a show of airpower over Nasiriyyah would be good. Ambassador Crocker told Adel that he had spoken with General Othman, who informed him that

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additional forces would be moved into Kut. Adel reiterated that the Sadrist movement was small, and that if the communique issued by al-Sadr was indeed true, then there really is confusion and dissent in the ranks.

16. (S) Continuing, the Ambassador said he assumed that the no-confidence vote against the PM in the COR, which was initiated by the Sadr Trend, was going nowhere. Adel assured him it had no support other than from the Sadrist bloc. Tawafug has refused, and so have the Kurds. He also said that Sadr Trend and COR member Baha al-Araji called him, but that he and the Sadrist were only playing games. Adel said that even though ISCI had differences with the PM, now was the time to stand behind him. Any defeat of Maliki at this stage would be catastrophic, a point on which both the Ambassador and S/I Satterfield agreed.

On the Road to Damascus  
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15. (S) Adel also used this occasion to inform the Ambassador and S/I Satterfield that he would be representing the GOI at the Arab League summit, which will be held this weekend in Damascus, Syria. The Ambassador discouraged Adel from attending, noting that his presence would be interpreted as significant. Adel countered that his absence would likewise be significant, which both the Ambassador and S/I Satterfield said is exactly what the U.S. wants. Responding that his attendance at the summit reflects the will and desire of all of the major players in the GOI, he added that the GOI needs to be well-represented at this event, which he said FM Zebari is not comfortable attending. Ambassador Crocker stated flatly that "if the GOI insists on making its friends unhappy, perhaps he (Adel) should use this occasion to be clear with the Syrians." Appearing defensive, Adel stated that he has always been clear with the Syrians, and also with the Iranians. In addition, he said that he has always been clear and straight with the Americans, from the time Ambassador Paul Bremer was head of the CPA until the recent visit of Vice President Cheney. When the Ambassador later

asked Adel how long he would be out of Iraq, Adel indicated only 3-4 days. Both the Ambassador and Satterfield again urged Adel not to attend, with Satterfield saying that he should send FM Zebari in his place. Attempting to evade the suggestion, Adel said that the FM was already occupied with preparatory meetings for the summit.

#### Iraq and Its Neighbors

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¶16. (S) Commenting on his upcoming trip to Damascus, Adel said that Maliki has given him security reports which show Syria's continued interference in Iraq. Adel promised to confront the Syrians with this information. Ambassador Crocker signaled that the U.S. has clear evidence that the Syrians are still supporting the transit of suicide bombers to Iraq. Stating that the Iraqis also have evidence of this, as well as of Iranian involvement in Iraq, he asked rhetorically what Iraq could do -- break relations with its neighbors? The Ambassador rebutted that it does not appear that Ahmadinejad returned home to Iran and decided to stop interfering in Iraq, and cited evidence of recently-made Iranian weapons that have been discovered among the Sadrists. Adel responded that the issue is not just about Iraq, but also Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Israel. Ambassador Crocker coolly noted that "Iraq has to live in the neighborhood, but the neighbors can't get away with murder."

#### SOFA/SFA Negotiations

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¶17. (S) Regarding the SOFA/SFA negotiations, Adel shared that he had a good meeting with Deputy FM Hamoud, in which they discussed the SOFA talks. Noting that the talks are now in their third day, the Ambassador commented that the PM understands the negotiations much better, and that the U.S. and GOI teams are focused on these talks. Remarking that the SFA will be conducted at a higher level than the SOFA talks, he indicated that the PM appears ready to task these talks to the Executive Council or the Political Committee for National Security. Adel interjected that he could assist with the negotiations. Both the Ambassador and Satterfield strongly cautioned against allowing the PM's office staff to assume a dominant role in the talks, warning that the USG cannot repeat the problems that were encountered during the Declaration of Principles and UNSCR renewal negotiations. Adel also said that the U.S. can take advantage of the situation, which the Ambassador responded to by saying that the U.S. and the GOI need a deal negotiated between friends and allies. Adel agreed, and cautioned against making the talks a two-stage process. He added that the PM needs to be

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included in the talks from the beginning, and that both parties need to move forward on this issue together. Ambassador Crocker concurred, and reiterated that there cannot be a repeat of the Declaration of Principles. Returning to the main topic of the meeting, Adel also said that the crackdown on the Sadrists would have positive results. Before departing, Adel reminded Ambassador Crocker not to forget about Nasiriyyah, and he also mentioned that the Sadrists were receiving their orders from Najaf.  
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